



MID-COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

March 29, 2011

The Honorable Valerie Ervin
President, Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Council President Ervin and Councilmembers:

The Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB) appreciates the opportunity to share with you our suggestions on how to address the very serious budget crisis facing our County and to re-enforce your resolve to address our residents' most critical needs and services as well as ensure that we lay a foundation that will lead to greater fiscal health and solvency in coming years.

The budget crisis that we are now facing has resulted in the need to make difficult but necessary recommendations. However, we must confront the fact that by avoiding or ignoring some of these options, no matter how undesirable they may be, will likely result in weakening our county's resources over an extended period of time, and prolong the negative impact that the economic downturn has imposed on our community.

We do want to acknowledge that both the Council and County Executive Leggett have done an outstanding job of addressing a number of stakeholders and in an attempt to address the needs of a large and diverse population. It is with our appreciation and thanks that we move forward with our recommendations to further promote the mission of the Council through a financially healthy and stable county economy.

We have four recommendations that we will relay below.

Recommendation #1

We are in agreement with County Executive Leggett that, in order to preserve as many services as our budget will allow, and with the knowledge that the vast majority of our budget is allocated to fixed costs, we must attempt to reduce our operating costs in a way that will be fair, will maximize the number of jobs and services preserved, and transparent. To that end, we are in agreement with the plan to restructure health insurance and pension benefits and support extending it across all county employees, including those in the Montgomery County Public School System. We also support changes in the Maintenance of Effort Law and the State Education Article to authorize the Council to approve and reject economic provisions of a collective bargaining agreement (see Attachment A).

While we understand that MCPS provides valuable services to the community and has contributed to making the school system in our county among the most admired in the nation, we believe that not only is the current restructuring plan modest, but that by extending it to all employees, we are indicating a commitment to parity and equality.

All employees contribute to the success and well-being of our community and, our suggestion is that in these painful times, we stand together and ask everyone endure a little bit of the pain instead of a select few absorbing the brunt of it.

Recommendation #2

Looking beyond the current moment, we believe there is a long-term structural budget deficit, especially if you account for the unfunded County liabilities and the potential for a rating downgrade and the ensuing reputational and opportunity cost this would create. We recommend modest 3% cut, 3% in public employee salaries in order to preserve some critical services, with significant savings going toward reserves.

Recommendation #3

While we support creation of the Office of Community Engagement, we do not support proposed staffing reductions in the Regional Services Centers. We urge you to maintain current staffing levels at the Regional Services Centers. We also support increased use of the Regional Services Centers' Citizens Advisory Boards (see Attachment A).

Recommendation #4

The MCCAB recommends that the County Council and the County Executive pursue efforts to reorganize and streamline county functions as reflected in the attached recommendations proposed by the Organizational Reform Commission (see Attachment A).

Recommendation #5

Given the proposed cutbacks to the Olney police satellite station in a time when violent crimes are occurring in that community, we recommend reconsidering and eliminating those cutbacks, and funding the station to a level that will allow adequate service to Olney residents.

Recommendation #6

We support the \$.05 bag tax to promote environmental concerns and promote consumer responsibility.

We thank you for the opportunity to share our suggestions with you and we wish you well in your budget deliberations.

Sincerely,



Blaine Charak
Chair

Attachment

cc: County Executive Isiah Leggett

Dear Mr. Leggett and President Ervin,

The Montgomery County Organizational Reform Commission (the Commission) released its final report on January 31, 2011. The deliberations of the Commission have been discussed at several meetings of the Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB).

Most recently the MCCAB reviewed the Commission's final report at its February 15, 2011 meeting and passed motions in support of the following Commission recommendations:

I. Structural and Organizational Changes

Boards, Committees and Commissions

2. Increase use of the Regional Services Centers' citizen advisory boards and the Office of Community Partnerships, whenever possible, in lieu of creating new citizen boards or committees.
4. Reorganize the Human Rights Commission, folding its functions into other entities, and eliminate the HRC office.
6. Reorganize the Criminal Justice Coordinating Commission (CJCC) so that it is housed and staffed within the County Police Department, and eliminate the executive director position.

Workforce Training

7. Enable the Montgomery County Workforce Investment Board, the Division of Workforce Services (DWS), and its contractors to coordinate oversight of the workforce grants awarded by the Executive and the Council.

Legal Services

8. Increase efforts to substitute costly contracted legal services with in-house expertise.
9. Form a Task Force to create a consolidated Montgomery County Law Office that would serve multiple agencies.

Housing

Attachment A

10. Establish a Task Force on a Montgomery Housing and Redevelopment Department, to begin the process of blending the Housing Opportunities Commission and the Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

Parks and Recreation

11. Transfer all of the Parks Department's "user services" to the Executive Branch of County government, as part of the Department of Recreation. Retain responsibility for park planning, environmental stewardship, and ownership of park property at the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

Procurement

13. Create a Shared Service Center for purchasing goods and services that would serve all County agencies with a centralized procurement schedule and catalogue.

Real Estate and Facilities

14. Centralize real estate and facilities functions that are now handled separately by each of the County agencies.

The 311 System

15. Consolidate information distribution and call center activities by expanding the County government's 311 system so that it also serves the other agencies.

Information Technology

16. Consolidate the County's information technology leadership into a single independent Chief Information Officer (CIO).

II. Procedural and Operational Changes

Collective Bargaining

18. Make the collective bargaining process more transparent and increase opportunities for public input.

School Funding

Attachment A

22. Seek changes in the State's Maintenance of Effort (MOE) law.
23. Seek changes in the State Education Article to authorize the Council to approve or reject the economic provisions of a collective bargaining agreement.

Information Technology

24. Embolden all County departments and agencies to move in the direction of converting to Cloud and Thin Client computing.
25. Expand the outsourcing of "seat management" to MCPS and Montgomery College.
26. Consolidate major IT platforms and provide for a migration path.

Liquor Control

27. Expand contracting of warehouse night-loading operations at the Department of Liquor Control to all warehouse operations and improve retail services.
28. Contract out for a financial and performance audit of the Department of Liquor Control.

I hope you find this information useful as you deliberate the Commission's final report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "L. Blaine Charak", written in a cursive style.

Blaine Charak
Chair
Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board